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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: CHAVEZ RENEWS ALLEGATIONS OF U.S. PLOTTING

Classified By: Stephen G. McFarland, Deputy Chief of Mission,
for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

Summary

1. (C) President Hugo Chavez repudiated international criticisms against the GOV for human rights violations and undemocratic practices, speaking to the diplomatic corps March 5. DCM attending on behalf of the Ambassador, walked out after Chavez reasserted allegations, made most recently February 29 that the USG was responsible for the events of April 11, 2002, and continues to finance subversive groups in Venezuela. Chavez worked through the figures from the National Electoral Council (CNE) that he alleged demonstrated his theory of "megafraud" carried out by the opposition. The two-and-a-half hour speech, carried on all broadcast media (cadena), is Chavez's attempt to discredit the opposition on the eve of its major march on March 6, and to counter the poor image the GOV has created overseas. End Summary.

Chavez Lashes Out At USG

2. (U) President Hugo Chavez convened the diplomatic corps March 5 for a two-and-a-half hour speech to "clear up confusion" that other countries might have had regarding the political situation in Venezuela. The address was nationally broadcast obligatorily on all Venezuelan television and radio stations. Chavez began with renewed accusations that the USG planned the April 2002 alleged coup attempt. He reiterated allegations that the U.S. had warships at the ready and attack helicopters at the airport to carry out the coup, similar, he said, to what happened to Haitian President Aristide. Chavez said the USG is financing "terrorist" groups in Venezuela seeking to destabilize the GOV. He played scenes from the pro-Chavez documentary "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" to make his point. How long, he queried the ambassadors, must we endure this type of intervention.

3. (C) After Chavez's wild accusations on February 29 in which he said the U.S. is preparing an invasion or blockade of Venezuela and threatened to cut off oil, the Ambassador chose not to attend and instead sent the DCM with instructions to leave if appropriate. After Chavez attacked the U.S., Chavez asserted that the U.S. was currently supporting and financing coup plotters. The DCM stood up, looked Chavez in the eye, and walked out without comment.

Opposition Are The Violent Ones

4. (U) Chavez showed photos from the February 27 march and subsequent demonstrations showing demonstrators throwing rocks and holding slingshots. He said they also had machine guns and heavy weapons, though did not show images of them. He accused the opposition of attempting to sabotage the Group of 15 Summit on February 27. After February 27, the President charged, the opposition engaged in "foquismo," trying to incite an uprising through localized demonstrations.

5. (U) Chavez also accused the press of an international campaign to discredit Venezuela's human rights' record. He said those in the opposition are coup-plotters dressing up like supporters of democracy and human rights. Chavez defended GOV security forces for "fulfilling the role of the state in maintaining public order." He blamed the four leading Venezuelan television stations and CNN as accomplices in a plot to promote "urban subversion and terrorism." He described what he believed international reaction would be when (not if) he closed one or more news media, and then lamented he would have to take this step.

Fraud is Everywhere

16. (U) Chavez poured over the National Electoral Council's (CNE) preliminary results of the opposition's signature drive in support of a recall referendum against him. He showed television spots from the CNE and the NGO Sumate that, he said, made clear that all signers must have filled out their personal data on the signature forms (Note: The CNE placed 876,017 "in observation" for these supposed irregularity.) Chavez showed several examples of irregularities in the forms such as signatures by minors, foreigners, deceased, and errors in filling out the forms. The President challenged the opposition to go to the requisite appeals process, saying that he would agree to three days and 2,700 centers for the process. He said he welcomed all international observers to watch the appeals, subject to rules laid down by the CNE.

Comment

17. (C) Chavez continued the anti-U.S. message that he took to new levels February 29. His statement about closing opposition media coincides with the editorial line of GOV daily "Vea," and should be taken as a serious threat. The audio-visual components of the session made this more like his weekly television address "Alo, Presidente" rather than an address to the diplomatic corps. Chavez gave his side of the story fully, but in doing so it is unlikely he won over many members of the diplomatic community. More likely, by maintaining and broadcasting his tough attitude, he is signaling that he will not cede on the signatures appeals process. He is also telling all Venezuelans that he will not back off from the measures he has been taking against their protests. That said, we believe Chavez remarks reflect concern that Venezuela's international reputation has declined in the last week. Chavez may also be worried the opposition will gain momentum from the outpouring of condemnation for violating human rights and democratic practices by international human rights groups and foreign press.

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